Behind the Veil in the Orient

A Review by LOUIS A. SPRINGER.

AN INDISCREET CHRONICLE FROM THE PACIFIC. By Putnam Weale. Dodd, Mead & Co.

NO one in the least familiar with the Far East has any doubt but that Bertram Lenox Simpson, or, since we are better acquainted with him by his pen name, Putnam Weale, knows his China by long residence and his Japan by consequent geographical propinquity. He served under that master of the Orient, Sir Robert Hart, and, as a loyal and hard working pupil he gained his rudimentary knowledge not by hearsay but by actual experience. When, years ago, he gave the world "Indiscreet Letters from Peking" it knew that it was reading of the inside life of the Manchu capital. When it reads now his latest work, "An Indiscreet Chronicle from the Pacific," it may be assured that it is getting an intelligent sidelight on Oriental political conditions.

Mr. Simpson was one of the advisers of the Chinese delegation at the Washington Disarmament Conference. He came, however, earlier than that to America. In May, 1917, China obtained secret information that Japan had determined to take up directly with the United States the question of the Pacific and was making a desperate effort to secure the withdrawal of the American Asiatic squadron as a preliminary to establishing the so called Japanese doctrine for eastern Asia. Mr. Simpson was asked to come to this country to convey a warning and to get consideration of the vital facts.

He sailed from Japan the same day as the Ishii mission, which was expected to eliminate the United States from the Far East, but the quick Canadian route put him down in San Francisco days before the fateful mission had arrived. "I can still see the surprised faces of the Japanese officials as they arrived at their hotels after the official reception," he writes. "Soldiers had been so thick on the ground that the Japanese must have wondered why Homer Lea in his remarkable warning, 'The Valor of Ignorance,' had declared that California and the territory west of the Rockies lay in the hollow of Japan's hand. Nothing but troops and camps and camps and troops. America was not only armed but showing her men. Any idea of getting the United States to accept the general scheme which had eliminated the British fleet east of Singapore must in the face of this demonstration have been quietly dropped by the Japanese mission into the bay of San Francisco twenty-four hours after they landed."

But this was not exactly the outcome of the Japanese mission. Why it was not forms an interesting chapter in diplomacy which certainly is not familiar to Americans. "And," again quoting from the book, "is not diplomacy amusing?" To agree on points by trumpery diplomatic methods when there were other prospects in the offing was plainly an evasion. The Senate finally adopted the formal resolution requesting the President to call a conference with Great Britain and Japan on naval reduction. "After weeks of conference between the two Houses this was added as an amendment to the naval bill and was the origin of the Washington Conference."

Of this conference it is undoubtedly best to read the chapters in the book devoted to it rather than a mere abstract of them. Neither the contentions of the Chinese and Japanese nor the reasons for them can be briefly stated. The psychology of the most important issue, according to Mr. Simpson, was clearly misunderstood, and "moreover, no matter how great was the modification made on the Pacific so as to bring the United States within the circle of friendship, China stood just as poor a chance of fair treatment."

There is perhaps something of the Oriental in the suggestion that men's legs are more important as a political indication than their hands and head and should always be attentively studied. "Secretary Hughes, standing still, with his arms hanging loosely beside him, disclosed imperfect knees and small feet—two dangerous characteristics. They mean a proneness to the influence of others; a tendency to accept formulas without proper inquiry; an absence of true conviction." But while this may have proved true in the Orient the Secretary's course at the conference did not fulfill the prophecy.

Of Japan's future the author attempts no predictions. For centuries the race has been trained to conceal and repress, he writes, and no man at the present moment, not even the Japanese themselves, can say what will be the state of the nation five years hence. With unusual frankness he observes that little originality has been shown by the Chinese leaders educated abroad. He considers it a remarkable fact that a race as intellectual as the Chinese should have failed to produce in the revolutionary period a single strong personality with strong views and executive capacity.

And there is a warning to the outside world in his statement that the Chinese will not agree among themselves on any single issue for at least a generation unless there is a binding compact involving foreign nations as well as themselves, with admittedly just means of dealing with infractions. They are too numerous, he says, and their territory too vast, their society too upset for anything else to be possible.

Indiscretion is not the only quality in this chronicle from the Pacific. It is decidedly interesting in its revelations and in many cases uncompromisingly frank.

H. G. Wells's Short World History

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the world that Ferdinand Foch presided over the armies of the Allies in 1918? Mr. Wells, mentioning the great war, might have named its finest military figure.

Mr. Wells informs us with meticulous care that in A. D. 390 Theodosius the Great caused the great statue of Jupiter Serapis at Alexandria to be destroyed. He does not inform us that Thomas A. Edison, by his invention of the incandescent lamp, brought more safety, comfort and convenience to the world than all the Roman emperors ever thought of.

In such omissions as these Mr. Wells is astonishing. The ordinary old fashioned historian was expected to bring out of the box all the stock figures. But Mr. Wells, in spite of his own criticism of historians for playing up Julius Cæsar, has played up a lot of little Cæsars and at the same time neglected the characters whose work is of the greatest importance to the world to-day—the world that his readers live in.

It is not meant that Mr. Wells has utterly neglected the great history of the present and the immediate past. He has a brief chapter on "The Industrial Revolution" and a longer chapter on "The Development of Modern Ideas." But he has not measured the century and a half following the American Revolution with the yardstick which a man of Wells's reputation should carry. He has not measured the advance of science in its relation to human life in the way his admirers expect of him. When a historian finds room for the work of the Arabian alchemists who sought the elixir of life he should find room also for the wonderful story of the advance of medical knowledge, from the discovery of the circulation of the blood down to the victory over yellow fever—yes, down to the interesting hunt of the mysterious vitamin. A historian who makes room for the stories of ancient religions should make room for telling of the discovery of anæsthetics.

Mr. Wells has a fine imagination for prehistoric things and a magnificent vision of the future. Is he too close to the present to see it in its relation to the whole story of the human race? Or does he feel that everybody knows the things he omits and therefore omits them purposely? This does not seem reasonable. Perhaps even the durable Wells grew weary as the scene broadened after the middle of the book. Writing a history of the world is a large order. It is a particularly hard job if the historian lets too many kings and soldiers stand between him and the two billion people who make the world go round with their plows and their hammers, their loves, their little ambitions and their faith in something better beyond the grave.

Some times it seems that Mr. Wells surveys historical occurrences from a point too far off. Take, for instance, his comment on the discovery of the internal combustion engine. To him it means but one thing—rendering flight possible. To the man in the street in this country it means automobiles and tractors; comfort and pleasure for millions of families; the ability to live in the country, miles from the railroad; quick and cheap transportation of food; the rescue of the farmer from the old slavery. But airplanes, which appeal to Mr. Wells, carry diplomatic dispatches, while motor cars carry babies and bread; and it is hard to make the historians class babies and bread as more important to history than documents of state.

Most historians love the dramatic and are likely to let it sway them too much. Of course the dramatic is necessary for the interest of the book; but not all drama in history relates to battle or victory. Mr. Wells has in this book a good deal about the Holy Roman Empire, that theater of the old dramatics; but he omits the final acts: Charles of Austria, the last remnant of the Empire, going down the Danube to exile and death. No scene in all the European cataclysm was more typical of what had happened to kings and princes.

If considerable fault has been found here with Mr. Wells's book, the fault is not with what he has done but with what he has left undone. His is a good book in many ways. If he had left off the last hundred pages and called it a history of the world up to modern times it would be more worthy of him. But so much is expected of Mr. Wells that the latter part of the volume is sure to be disappointing.

If he had waited ten years after the publication of the "Outline" and then struck out to write a new short history it is likely that he would have done better. He has treated of kings and generals, states and churches, but he has not given the people and their progress a place in the sun that should be theirs. As a history of the human race Mr. Wells's book is not as good as "A Brief History of the World," which was written two years ago by Prof. George Willis Botsford of Columbia University in collaboration with Jay Barrett Botsford. These men viewed the procession from beside the hearthstone. Mr. Wells sees it from a tree.

Behind the Scenes With the Kaiser

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE KAISER. By the Baroness Von Larisch. Hertag Publishing Corporation.

THIS book may be wholeheartedly indorsed or denounced, as the reader prefers, as a thoroughly scandalous affair. The motive that prompted the writing of it is of course a matter of conjecture. It may have been spite and it may have been cupidity. But in strict fairness it must be said that having started out to write an abominable book the Baroness Von Larisch persisted resolutely and unswervingly to the end. There is perceptible no moment of squeamish hesitation. There is nothing that smacks of ambiguity even in the picture of the alleged relations of the Kaiser and the Crown Prince with the edifying Round Table group. "Behind the Scenes With the Kaiser" may be found disgusting; it will not be found disappointing.

John Drew's French

A FEW weeks ago there was told in the book section the story of Disraeli's projected speech in French at the Berlin conference, and the diplomatic manner in which one of his aides persuaded the Premier to confine himself to English. That suggests a somewhat similar tale told in John Drew's "My Years on the Stage," reviewed for THE NEW YORK HERALD by Mr. Otis Skinner. One night at supper in Chicago Mme. Sarah Bernhardt asked Mr. Drew (the conversation being carried on in French) if he would go to Paris and act with her in a play. Says Mr. Drew: "I was very diffident about my French—that is, the thought of going to Paris to play in French made me feel diffident. 'But my French is not good enough,' I said in answer to her query. She said: 'You speak French very well.' 'Yes, that's all right—the fluency of it, perhaps, but not the accent.' 'Oh, that won't matter. This is an Englishman you are going to play.'"